

## **Findings and Recommendations**

### **FINDINGS**

**Finding 1: The Puget Sound region is experiencing severe strain on its transportation system. This strain is clearly noticeable through several important indicators, especially congestion.**

**Finding 2: Continued population and transportation demand growth in the region has created a looming regional transportation crisis caused in part by a history of under funding transportation in the region.**

**Finding 3: The absence of unified regional transportation governance system is a second important cause that has contributed to the looming crisis.**

**Finding 4: Our current system of transportation governance delivers inadequate results, and needs fundamental systemic change to meet our state's transportation needs.**

**Finding 5: The region needs to tap all available sources to finance transportation including new taxes and tolling. Tolling has the virtue of managing demand for transportation as well as generating revenue.**

**Finding 6: Even if all identifiable revenue sources are tapped, there will be inadequate resources available to meet all of the identified needs in the Destination 2030 Plan.**

**Finding 7: The region must effectively prioritize regional transportation projects on a unified basis. This has not occurred because there is no governmental entity responsible for prioritizing projects regionally across geography and modes.**

**Finding 8: Our transit systems, initially developed to provide local service, are now forced to play a large role in regional transportation networks.**

**Finding 9: The policy of sub-regional equity introduces a sense of fairness, but can produce results inconsistent with prioritizing regionally.**

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## **PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION**

**We recommend that the State Legislature create a 15 member Puget Sound Regional Transportation Commission (PSRTC) which has authority and responsibility for planning, prioritizing and funding all modes of regional transportation for the four county area.**

- In order to effectively prioritize and plan transportation projects, regional transportation decision-making should be shifted to the region.
- Regional governance should be based on regional goals and objectives and should stitch together existing agencies rather than create a new layer of bureaucracy.
- The body should have the authority to address the critical needs in planning and finance including responsibility for certain elements of growth management and land use.

**The new PSRTC should have responsibility for land use and transportation planning, prioritization and funding.**

- The PSRTC would absorb the responsibilities and organization of the PSRC as the Municipal Planning Organization (MPO) under federal law and the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) under state law.
- Land use and transportation planning are inextricably linked and therefore the PSRTC would integrate land use and transportation planning. The PSRTC will need to work multi-jurisdictional environment basis to get projects built.
- A systemic, regional approach to transit and roads will require viewing all of the components of the transportation network on a coordinated multimodal basis.
- Though many agencies engage in prioritization, a regional entity should be created to coordinate planning on a long-term basis between the different transportation entities.

**The PSRTC should have the authority to generate revenue from tax and transportation usage based sources to pay for future transportation projects.**

- Identifiable transportation funding sources for future projects are inadequate for the needs of the region. Even if all possible new sources including increases in sales, property, motor vehicle fuel and excise taxes were raised to maximum levels, total revenue generated would be less than is required.
- A regional governance structure is needed to coordinate the use of all tax and usage based revenue sources as a part of an overall financing strategy.
- The Legislature should allocate all money generated from transportation tax sources in the region for regional projects. We specifically recommend that money collected within

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the region from State fuels and State Motor Vehicle Excise taxes (MVET) be allocated by the PSRTC. Those funds should be prioritized and managed by the PSRTC.

- We further recommend that the new PSRTC be granted broad authority to levy regional taxes sufficient to meet regional transportation needs, including regional property, sales local option fuel taxes and MVET.
- There is a vital need for new or more revenue from regional, usage based (non-tax) sources, including tolling, regional transit fares and parking fees that would be both a source of revenue and as tools to managing demand.

### **The PSRTC should have the authority to implement regional demand management tools.**

- There is presently no effective, coordinated regional transportation demand management system and very little operating coordination between roads and transit operators.
- The PSRTC should develop a comprehensive demand management strategy which utilizes techniques such as dynamic use of tolling, parking fees and faring to encourage and incentivize more efficiently utilize our transportation system.
- Parking fees or taxes could be used as a tool to shift demand as a tool in transportation management.
- More work is needed with large employers and schools in order to shift their employees' commute times in order to reduce travel during busy hours.
- The PSRTC should have the authority and be encouraged to use new technologies to implement demand management systems.

### **The PSRTC should take full responsibility for all State Roads, "Roads of Statewide Significance" as well as "Roads of Regional Significance."**

- This authority should extend to planning, prioritizing projects, allocating state and federal monies, regional taxing authority and tolling.
- It is necessary to identify roads of regional significance which would be subject to PSRTC jurisdiction by designating that any project over a certain dollar amount be overseen by the new PSRTC.
- The new PSRTC should take life cycle responsibility for all of these projects including construction of new capacity, preservation and maintenance authority.
- The new PSRTC should have the responsibility for all regional projects but delegate construction to WSDOT.

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**The PSRTC should have authority over planning, prioritizing and financing regional transit projects including Sound Transit.**

- The questions of coordination, standardization, and consolidation of these geographically entwined agencies are serious ones. We recognize the value of agencies that are responsive to local needs and the tension between those needs and the potential for improved regional efficiency.
- Transit agencies need to increase cooperation so that transit can absorb a larger portion of peak time and off-peak users.
- The PSRTC should own, finance and operate Sound Transit as a regional transit resource and coordinate regional routes and standardize regional fares between transit agencies.

**The PSRTC should be a fifteen-member body, with nine elected and six appointed members.**

- Nine elected Commissioners would be chosen from proportional districts, to ensure broad geographic representation. The remaining six Commissioners would be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. The Governor would designate one of those members as chair of the PSRTC.
- Appointed members would be selected on the basis of expertise in relevant subject areas such as in planning, construction, finance and management. Appointed members should be geographically diverse if possible.
- While former elected officials should be eligible if qualified, current elected officials would not be eligible to fill these positions – so that commissioners can solely focus on regional needs.
- The Commissioners should serve six year terms and be eligible to hold office for two full terms. We recommend that Commissioners be appointed as non-partisans to part time positions. The PSRTC Commissioners should be well-paid part time positions. Terms should be staggered to assure historical continuity and that experience is retained when membership changes.
- The PSRTC should coordinate with WSDOT but the Secretary of Transportation should not serve on the Commission to eliminate any potential conflict of interest.
- We recommend a high standard for removing a commissioner such as recall for the elected members and impeachment or termination for cause for the appointed members.

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**The boundary of the PSRTC should include all of King, Snohomish, Pierce, and Kitsap counties, as this is the optimum boundary for all modes of transportation requiring current and future planning.**

- As the region grows, the Commission's region could be enlarged to include other counties, such as Skagit, Thurston and Island Counties. There needs to be a process by which the PSRTC can be gracefully expanded with reasonable incentives for both new comers and the original counties in the region.

**The PSRTC should not operate on the basis of strict sub-area or modal equity.**

- The new PSRTC should not be burdened with a requirement to spend money evenly by mode and/or across geographies. Money should be allocated based on regional need and a broad sense of fairness. A geographically balanced, majority elected PSRTC would be able to fairly allocate money without specific rules or requirements.
- The RTID statute and Sound Transit board policy requirement that money be spent in proportion to taxes raise can undermine the PSRTC meeting regional needs and those requirements should be eliminated. Raising money separately by mode has the effect of ignoring regional needs irrespective of differences in density or use patterns.

### **OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. We recommend that there be further study on the efficiency implications of the presently-fragmented transportation system some of which are beyond the scope of the proposed PSRTC. This work could be done by an expert commission or the State Auditor.
2. We recommend a study of the implications of further integrating or possibly combining the local transit systems into a single organization. This work could be done by the new PSRTC, an expert commission or the State Auditor.
3. We believe that the issue of permitting should be examined to see if there are efficiencies in streamlining the process of gaining transportation and environmental permits.
4. We recommend that the State Legislature align the WSDOT districts with the four county Puget Sound region whether or not they create the PSRTC.